

Hon Peter Collier; Hon Dr Steve Thomas; Hon Robin Scott; Hon Michael Mischin; Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Colin Tincknell; Hon Tjorn Sibma

McGOWAN GOVERNMENT — POLICIES

Motion

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [10.10 am] — without notice:
I move —

That this house acknowledges that many Western Australians are worse off since the election of the McGowan government as a direct result of its policies.

At the end of my first term in this place, we faced an election, obviously, not even three and a half years after the previous one. I find it is almost groundhog day at the moment, because at three-quarter time we are coming up to another election and the issues that we faced at that 2008 election are, fundamentally, exactly the same as those we are facing now. Are people better off now in Western Australia as a result of the Labor government? In 2008, people emphatically answered no, quite legitimately. A new government was formed, so we had a bonus extra eight months. The Labor Party consistently pointed to what it had done, saying, “Look, we have this great surplus, this wonderful surplus—isn’t it wonderful, we have a great set of books”, but the service industries of Western Australia had suffered dismally. I remind members of a couple of those issues. People assume that with a socialist government, they will get those basic services that people need to rely upon, but they did not get them. They did not get electricity. We ran out of electricity. They did not get gas. We ran out of gas. There were 264 classrooms throughout Western Australia without a teacher because our teachers were the lowest paid in the nation. There was a great escape at the Supreme Court, so the government could not be relied upon for the basic premise of law and order. Fundamentally, the public of Western Australia voted with their feet; that is, they abandoned the Labor Party, and the Liberal and National Parties were elected to office. As I said, the Labor government had this great set of books. It could have quite easily paid teachers more and given them what they richly deserved, and it would have overcome a lot of that suffering that it endured, particularly over the last 18 months of its administration, in terms of the dissent that was shown by the teaching profession.

We fast-forward. In March 2017, members opposite had an emphatic win against our mob. We took that on the chin. The people of Western Australia had voted accordingly. But at the end of our term, we had never run out of gas, we had never run out of electricity and our teachers were the highest paid in the nation. We put a teacher in front of every classroom in every year that we were in office, we transformed the metropolitan and regional landscape of the state, and Western Australians were definitely better off. Without a shadow of a doubt—I will come back to this later—in response we will hear stuff about the debt level and members opposite will say that it is our legacy. I would love members opposite to ask those literally tens of thousands of people who are enjoying the stadium, Elizabeth Quay, Perth City Link, the Scarborough foreshore and the enormous attributes that were provided through the royalties for regions program whether they feel that they did quite well out of our administration. I am sure that they will say yes. We are at three-quarter time; believe it or not, three years have almost gone. Within 18 months, when the public of Western Australia go to the ballot box on the second Saturday in March 2021, they will be asked to yet again consider that very profound and legitimate question: “Am I better off now than I was in March 2017?” I will now go through a few areas and ascertain whether they will be able to say yes.

Let us look at a few things. Debt is expected to reach around \$40 billion by the next election. That is 20 per cent higher than when the McGowan government was elected in 2017, despite it saying that it would pay down debt just like paying off a mortgage. It has rivers of money. Yes, we cut back on spending. In particular, we froze members’ wages and judges’ wages and there were a few cosmetic things. The government cut back on spending, but at the same time there is no way that the government would now be sitting on a surplus if it were not for the wonderful agreement done by the Liberal–National federal government with the GST and the change in the price of iron ore. Having said all that, let us look at a few pragmatic things that really interest and concern members of the public. Household charges have increased by \$850 a year in a little over two years, with a further \$460 a year budgeted before the next election. There has been an increase of \$169 to the fixed-charge component of electricity bills, or 10.9 per cent for the representative household. We have had a six per cent increase in water, sewerage and drainage charges. There have been changes in public transport fares, including a 1.8 per cent increase in public transport standard fares, student fares increasing to 70¢ and a five per cent reduction in the discount on SmartRider fares. Vehicle licence charges will increase by 5.5 per cent. There has been a 2.8 per cent increase in motor industry insurance and a 1.7 per cent increase for drivers’ licences. There was a 3.3 per cent increase in the emergency services levy. The government has increased the cost of water for customers using 500 kilolitres a year by 40 per cent, hitting struggling suburbs such as Baldivis and Ellenbrook. That is not the rich western suburbs constituents, whom the government likes to think —

Hon Darren West interjected.

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Hon PETER COLLIER: No, it is not. Ask the people of Baldy; I can assure the member that it is not. The effect, of course, is that people are really struggling. Let us look at the impact of those household charges. According to the Economic Regulation Authority, the rate of residential electricity disconnections has more than doubled over the last two years, reaching a six-year high. It has doubled since these guys have had the treasury bench. In 2016–17, the government’s first year, 19 743 electricity customers were disconnected for not paying a bill, which was up from 15 935 disconnections. It has gone up by 2 000. In 2018–19, 21 705 residential electricity customers were disconnected for not paying their bills. That is a 37 per cent increase since 2016–17 and a 15 per cent increase on last year. It is now harder for customers to access the hardship utility grant scheme, which forces people in hardship to wait 180 days before they can receive hardship assistance. There are 31 552 residential electricity customers and 5 232 gas customers on a hardship program. This is up by 43.8 per cent for electricity customers.

The number of building approvals is a really good barometer of the economy and shows whether people have the capacity to purchase a property. Building approvals for new houses averaged 1 272 a month under the last year of the Liberal–National government—that is, March 2016 to February 2017. This fell eight per cent to an average of 1 179 approvals a month in the McGowan government’s first year in government. Approvals fell a further 10.5 per cent to an average of 1 055 a month during its second year in government. The average number of approvals each month for the first six months of the year was 946. This is lower than the first six months of data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1983. That is the impact that these guys are having. In absolute terms, building approvals for homes had fallen 29 per cent, from 1 219 in March 2017 to 854 in March 2019.

Over 144 811 households in WA are under mortgage stress, which equates to 18 per cent of mortgages or almost one in five houses. Mortgage stress is not concentrated only in the main urban areas; it continues to expand into regional areas. In WA, Brand has 39 713 households in stress; Tangney, 36 948; Stirling, 32 027; Curtin, 19 476; and Kalgoorlie, 16 627. WA has 12 of the top suburbs for mortgage defaults. Topping the list is Meadow Springs, Success, Tapping and Armadale. These are all people who will be passing judgement on these guys in 18 months. When they tick a box for Liberal, Labor, One Nation, Liberal Democrat, Greens or whoever it might be, they will ask, “Am I better off now than I was four years ago?” Evidently, they are not.

The regional sponsored migration scheme has been a roaring success! What a great success that has been! One of the first moves that the Premier made when he took office in 2017 was to write to the Prime Minister and have WA removed from the regional sponsored migration scheme. It slashed the number of jobs on the skills list from 178 to 18. Not one of the remaining 18 jobs relates to hospitality. One of the key areas of concern for the labour shortage is the hospitality area. I know that the government changed issues when it panicked a bit about training, so it has made some concessions on hospitality training, but that is because it messed up with the regional sponsored migration scheme.

The number of international students in Western Australia has dropped from 7.5 per cent of the market share in 2016 to 5.5 per cent this year. The loss of market share has stripped \$750 million per annum out of the WA economy, not to mention the associated housing market losses.

Page 77 of Tourism WA’s annual report states that the tourism spend is \$400 million below the government’s key performance indicators and well below the spend inherited from the previous government. One of the great success stories in tourism is the increasing number of interstate tourists coming to Western Australia. Where are most of them going and why are they coming over here? They are going to the footy at Optus Stadium. Who built the stadium? The previous government built the stadium. Do not take my word for it. This article in *The West Australian* of 3 October 2018 states —

Football—and Perth’s Optus Stadium—has been credited with one of the biggest jumps in interstate visitors to WA in recent years.

...

Tourism Council chief executive Evan Hall said the jump could be attributed to events at Optus Stadium, especially AFL matches.

Until the end of June, there were 14 AFL matches involving West Coast and Fremantle at the stadium.

In an opinion piece in today’s *The West Australian*, Mr Hall said these matches probably secured about 20,000 additional visitors to WA. Over a full season, this was expected to grow to more than 35,000 visitors.

...

“The stadium is a genuine example of what can be achieved when government and industry work together on a well-developed strategy to drive tourism to WA,” he said.

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“The then-State government made the right decisions to invest in the stadium and ensure it was designed to achieve clear objectives.

He would not want to stand for preselection for the Labor Party after commending the previous government! The current government can take absolutely no credit for the stadium. It fought it tooth and nail. It wanted to put it at Subiaco, where it would have been seriously constrained. It could not put it there because that is where it is now putting the high school. That was a thought bubble. It was going to put the high school in a skyscraper in Northbridge. That was the second option. That was a second thought, because it did not consult. It put everyone from Perth Modern School and the western suburbs offside because it was an ill-thought-out, ill-conceived policy framework. It cannot take credit for the stadium, I can assure members.

The impact has been profound in a number of areas, not the least of which is retail. Let us have a look at expenditure in retail. Expenditure across numerous areas remains at almost record levels since the election of the McGowan Labor government. That is a direct result of the fact that people do not have the cash flow, liquid assets or spare money to use for purchases. Expenditure on furniture, floor coverings, housewares and textile goods retailing is 14 per cent below the March 2017 levels. Expenditure on electrical and electronic goods retailing is eight per cent below the March 2017 levels. Expenditure on hardware, building and garden supplies retailing is nine per cent below the March 2017 levels. Expenditure on household goods retailing is 10 per cent below the March 2017 levels. Expenditure on clothing retailing is three per cent below the March 2017 levels. Expenditure on department store retailing is two per cent below the March 2017 levels. Expenditure on newspaper and book retailing is 25 per cent below the March 2017 levels. We do not even need those figures. All anyone needs to do is look at the number of shops in their local area that are vacant. They should look at the For Lease signs in the retail shops along Hay Street near where I live in Subiaco, or in Mt Lawley, Northbridge or Cannington. They are absolutely everywhere because of the crippling impact of this government’s policies. That impact is going to have a profound effect on a number of people.

Without a shadow of a doubt, the government’s response will be: “It’s all because we’ve had to pay down debt.” When the government first came to office—I have been through this on numerous occasions—members were told what to say when they faced the media. They got speaking notes week in and week out. Every single time, they were told what to say. I have the government’s speaking notes from November 2017 and they have not changed. Members are still doing it; they are still living in the past. They are still absolutely infatuated with the previous government. As a former teacher and tennis coach and as a member of Parliament, I always work on the ethos that if I work on the process, the outcome will take care of itself. I do not focus on my opponent; I focus on being the best I can be every day. These guys have their heads in the sand about being the best they can be every day. All they are concerned about is smashing the previous government. Let us have a look at these ridiculous juvenile speaking notes from 11 September 2017. They state —

- We have no option but to fix the mess left behind by the Liberal National Government.
- Everyone will share the burden to help pay for the Liberals and Nationals out of control spending.
- Fixing the mess we have inherited will take time, but we will do everything possible to minimise the impact on struggling families and small businesses.

That went well —

- There is no quick fix to budget repair, but overtime we will bring the State’s finances back under control and we will do it by not selling Western Power.

Even after six months, I could almost accept that and say, “Fair enough; give the previous guys a bit of a bash around the head.” But we are now talking about three-quarter time and these guys are still doing it. I looked at the opinion piece about the prison system by Hon Fran Logan in *The West Australian* of 2 October 2019 and three-quarters of it refers to the previous government. It is almost like these guys won the grand final by 15 goals and they said to the umpires three years later, “Let’s go back and play it again; we want to have another go.” That is what these guys are doing; they are absolutely obsessed with us. Surely the Minister for Corrective Services should be talking about the good things that he is doing after three years. The public has only so much patience with how many times this government can blame the previous guys. What about the training announcement by the Minister for Education and Training about a month ago? The government spent the next 48 hours entirely focused on Liza Harvey. It did up a graphic and a video. If I were training minister, I would be out there saying how wonderful we are, not worrying about the previous government. It is absolutely obsessed. Ministers cannot stand up and answer a question without talking about the previous government. They cannot put out a media release without talking about the previous government.

Members over here have an award called the “BTL” award—the blame the Libs award! The Leader of the House is right in front to win the BTL award. She will get a nice little award. Hon Alannah MacTiernan is rapidly catching

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up, but without a shadow of a doubt, after today, Hon Sue Ellery will be right in the lead. We are going to keep a record and I can guarantee that 90 per cent of her response will be her smashing the previous government, not carrying on about how wonderful the government is, its great attributes and what it has achieved, because she cannot. This is what the members of the public of Western Australia are going to judge the government on. They are not going to judge us on our performance in 2017; they are going to judge this government on its performance and whether it has improved their quality of life. What has the government done for the public of Western Australia? Members opposite cannot live in the past. Members of the public have had enough. Just look at what happened in May this year; 165 000 Western Australians who voted for Labor in March 2017 voted for the Liberals in May 2019. These guys have a problem. Twenty-nine per cent of Western Australians voted for Labor in May this year, down from the heady days of March 2017 when 42 per cent did so. As I said before, that is going to translate to the state level. These guys should not think for one second that a significant proportion of those people are not going to vote for the Liberals; they are soft Liberal and soft Labor people who voted for Labor last time and they have come home. They have looked at the two parties and have realised that they do not like what they see. All they hear from these guys is how bad the previous Liberal government was. All they see is opinion pieces and major announcements that show that the government is absolutely infatuated with the previous government. If we ask the residents of Moora whether they are better off, yes, they are. That is because of the federal Liberal government. It is not because of a Labor government—they saw what the Labor Party was going to do. If we ask people in the crayfishing industry whether they are better off, they will say no, because the government tried to nationalise their industry. If we ask the people at Landsdale Farm School whether they are better off, they will say no. If we ask the hundreds of thousands of Western Australians who are paying more for their utilities whether they are better off, they will say no. The emphatic message for you guys is that Western Australians are worse off as a result of this government.

HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West) [10.29 am]: I thank Hon Peter Collier for the opportunity to address a couple of key policy issues that the government has struggled with over the last two years, and particularly the impact of those policies on the government's budget management, which has been left wanting.

Hon Peter Collier mentioned a large number of issues, but I want to home in on some specific issues. I begin with the regional migration status of Perth. On Premier Mark McGowan's first day in office, he wrote to the federal government seeking to have it change the status of Perth from a regional centre to a capital city. At the time, Mr McGowan was very proud of that fact. He did so, I guess, in a fairly populist manner. However, I am concerned about the government's capacity to manage the economics of the state, and its own budget and fiscal problems. The Premier has a very poor understanding of economics and the outcomes of the policies that he promotes. Mr McGowan was very proud of it at the time, and, on 17 October 2017, he said in the other place —

We changed the skilled migration list. We deleted from the list all those ... occupations in which a large number of Western Australians are out of work.

He did not give the numbers, but he reduced the number of categories that could be put on the skilled migration list from 178 to 18. What has been the impact in Western Australia, and how has the government responded to that? One of the most obvious impacts was on foreign students. I have a few numbers about the trend in the number of foreign students. I will use only the numbers for the first six months of each financial year, because that will show members the trend. In 2014, the number of first semester foreign student enrolments in Western Australia was about 13 900. The equivalent in the next year, 2015, was 15 071. In 2016, it was 16 945. I note that in the second semester of 2016, foreign student enrolments peaked at 18 779. In the first half of 2017, perhaps on the back of the announcement of the Labor Party's policy on this issue, foreign student enrolments dropped to 15 828. Enrolments have currently dropped to the level they were back in 2014, at about 14 500. As has already been mentioned, Western Australia has lost a two per cent market share of foreign students. I would like to ask the government, "How is that policy working for you?" I do not think that policy is doing particularly well. In fact, it is doing so badly that the Premier had to make some comments in last Saturday's *The Weekend West*, in the article headlined, "Premier's foreigner backflip". I forget what number backflip we are up to with this government, but we are certainly giving Nadia Comaneci a fair run for her money! The article states —

The McGowan Government is pleading with Federal Immigration Minister David Coleman to make it easier for international students and foreign workers to migrate to WA in an apparent backflip on one of its key election commitments.

On his first day in power, Mr McGowan wrote to then prime minister Malcolm Turnbull requesting WA be removed from the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme ...

But two years of plunging foreign student numbers and lacklustre population growth have forced a reversal ...

...

Mr McGowan said a regional classification would improve the State's capacity to attract international students ...

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He woke up! It took two years, but he woke up. Somebody on the front bench must have nudged him with their elbow and said that maybe the government should do something about this. That policy is working particularly well—it is right up there with the Premier's understanding of a number of other economic policies!

The Premier's other great election commitment was the foreign buyers stamp duty surcharge. Somebody needs to explain to the Premier exactly what that is. On 16 May this year, the Premier said in the other place —

We took it to the state election because we wanted to ensure that foreign property purchasers actually contributed something towards all the infrastructure and every other beneficial support provided.

For some reason, the Premier seemed to think that foreign buyers were not paying any stamp duty on their purchases. Somebody should have read to him the actual agenda. It is a foreign buyers surcharge, which means they are paying a bit more. It is an additional charge. It is on top of what they are already paying. I do not think the Premier is particularly good at adding up. The Premier has a problem with his economic policy, because he did not understand that foreign purchasers were already making a contribution. The Premier finally had to wake up. I notice that this week, the government came out with an announcement. Guess what it has done? It has reduced stamp duty rates on the purchase of residential developments. That includes foreign purchasers; they will also gain this benefit. The government has finally realised that foreign purchasers play a role in the property market in Western Australia. The government has announced a reduction of up to \$50 000, or 75 per cent, of transfer duty for the pre-purchase of apartments in multistorey, multi-tiered developments. The Premier has finally woken up. It only took two years. He is doing very well. The government needs to pick up the amount of coffee that is provided in the members' bar, I think.

It was interesting to see the government's absolute enthusiasm for the foreign buyers surcharge. When it was introduced, the foreign buyers surcharge was expected to generate \$120 million over four years, or \$30 million a year. In this year's budget, that expectation has been dropped to \$20 million a year. However, some numbers have come out in the meantime. In the eight months to August this year, the foreign buyers surcharge raised \$8.3 million. The government's expectation that this would be a cash cow did not work. That is because it has had an impact. The government has finally woken up to that impact and decided to allow foreign purchasers to access its brand-new policy on stamp duty relief. That is not a bad thing.

I hope the Premier will continue to wake up and look at his economic policies. It would be nice to get an honest response from the government about how it is able to afford a range of its policies, including its policy to increase expenditure on maintenance programs. I am sick and tired of listening to the government and the Labor Party tell us about their good financial management. As I have discussed in my attempts to introduce the Legislative Council to what I call my plan for economic literacy, economic literacy does not exist for this government. Good economic management is not accidental. This government has a budget surplus not because it has developed good economic management, not because it has made savings and not because it has altered any particular structure. The only structural reform I can find is the machinery-of-government reforms. I have not seen any savings to date from that reform. I would be very interested to know how well the government is doing in making savings through the machinery-of-government changes. It has not made significant savings through that reform. It is not great budget management.

The reason the government has a budget surplus is that it is using the rewards of the GST reform. That was initially provided by then Treasurer Scott Morrison, and the money was handed over by now Prime Minister Scott Morrison. That is the only bit of this government's expenditure that is being put towards debt relief. The debt reduction fund outside of that is an accounting joke. The GST payments are making that happen. How will the government be able to afford to correct its disastrous financial mismanagement in its first two years in government, as the Premier finally wakes up? Hopefully, the Treasurer has been nudging the Premier and giving him a push. Hopefully, the Treasurer has been telling the Premier that a couple of billion dollars is available from the 2019 mini-boom in iron ore prices, and the government might be able to use that to correct some of its disastrous financial initiatives. That is not a bad thing. I would like the Treasurer to say so or the Premier to acknowledge it. That is exactly what is happening. Where is the money coming from for this stamp duty relief? It is coming from the mini iron ore boom. Where is the money coming from for the Minister for Education and Training's construction program? It is coming from the additional money from the mini iron ore boom. This government should be incredibly thankful for that. I asked at the beginning of this year: how likely is the price of iron ore to stay at \$US90 a tonne? Guess what? What date is it—22 or 23 October? It is still there today.

Hon Sue Ellery: It is 24 October.

Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS: It is still there today. This government has been lucky. It has not been a careful financial manager and it is about time it stopped being lucky and got on with the job of having a real financial plan to take forward the state of Western Australia.

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HON ROBIN SCOTT (Mining and Pastoral) [10.40 am]: I would like to support the Leader of the Opposition's non-government business motion. My personal friends and my constituents are all wondering what the next left-wing decision will be from this Labor government. Most people I have spoken to are affected one way or another by the selfish decisions being made regarding regional Western Australia. The most obvious selfish act is ministers answering questions without notice. All my questions without notice go out to many of my constituents, and many shake their heads at the answers. Along with the questions, we should offer multiple choice answers so that the minister concerned need only tick a box. That might give us a better response.

The proposed increase to the gold tax was the first attack on my electorate, shattering the hopes of many people of Kalgoorlie who are still smarting from that decision to seek a cash grab. I have spoken to many people who would gladly move to Kalgoorlie; however, the service industries, the hotels, the restaurants, the transport industries and the drilling companies all depend on the survival of the gold industry. With the threat of a possible increase in the gold tax, why would anyone give up their secure job and their home and move to Kalgoorlie or to anywhere in the regions? The Schools of the Air program was another failed attempt to scrounge a few dollars from education in the regions and cripple the youth and the future of pastoral WA. I know many pastoralist families, and if the government thought they were dealing with hicks or hillbillies, they certainly would have got a rude awakening. Another cost saving at the expense of regional Western Australia and cause of stress is the withdrawal of government services in my electorate. The Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety offices have been closed, and professional medical staff have left town and not been replaced. The latest is the multi-purpose taxi services debacle. We had five MP taxis in Kalgoorlie and now we have only three. The last three are about to pull the pin because the Minister for Transport is not attending to the concerns of the drivers, who are being threatened by huge fines and possible criminal charges under recent laws brought in by the government. I believe the transport minister has no understanding of the importance of this service to Kalgoorlie and to members of the public who require wheelchair-access taxis. I suggest that the transport minister take a large gulp of water, leave the comfort of her goldfish bowl and look into this matter urgently.

Metropolitan Perth is being hammered by rising utility costs, yet all the disconnections of people's power and gas seem to go unnoticed by the government. Iron ore prices remain high and the government stands to net billions of dollars over the next two years at least. The extra \$1.3 billion windfall from royalties and GST could be used to ease the rise in utility costs and even bring forward public works programs and create more jobs. My concern is that the extra money will go on more Local Projects, Local Jobs programs in Labor strongholds. I say to the government: the bulk of your money comes from the regions, and if you ignore the regions, it will be at your peril. Thank you.

HON MICHAEL MISCHIN (North Metropolitan — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [10.44 am]: I think there is some merit in Hon Robin Scott's idea about tick-the-box multiple-choice answers, although even if there were yes/no choices, the Attorney General would still find a way to weasel his way out of a straight response.

It is good to see that the Leader of the House is here. Normally, she is carried away with urgent parliamentary business and not able to respond on behalf of the government but it is good to see that she can deal with this issue.

Several members interjected.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: I will not take any interjections, thank you. The Leader of the House can distort my comments in due course.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Member, if you are not going to take them, perhaps you will direct your comments to me and not be distracted by noises bubbling away around the room.

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: Thank you very much, Madam President.

I enthusiastically support the motion presented by Hon Peter Collier. I will take a slightly different tack because I think it is a very fair motion. He is asking the house to acknowledge that "many" Western Australians are worse off since the election of the McGowan government and as a direct result of its policies. I will temper that by acknowledging that some people are better off since the election of the McGowan government. I suppose the obvious one is those on the other side of this chamber. There were years of criticism and attempts by the then opposition to frustrate any economic rationalisation by the then Barnett government. Things like rationalising feed-in tariffs, economies in the public service by getting rid of public servants who were deadwood and not able to do any function usefully and relatively modest increases in electricity prices to get them to a point at which services could be sustained rather than subsidised by taxpayers, were criticised roundly as a great imposition on the ordinary man and woman in the street. Now, of course, the cynicism and hypocrisy has come through because we have seen vast increases in utility costs under this government, all in the interest of budget repair.

The others to benefit have been ministers because apart from the power and influence they can wield and the ability to draw on a greater salary, some benefit in other ways. There was a nice little \$15 000 windfall for certain

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ministers who took advantage of a loophole in the Salary and Allowance Tribunal's determinations. That was not a bit of belt-tightening, at the expense of Western Australian taxpayers, that seemed to be necessary to address.

Still, it was not an unalloyed victory because some people on the back bench of the Labor Party are finding that their scope to achieve anything for electorates is very limited as a backbencher for that party. Quite apart from there being some talent on the back bench that will never advance unless they are a minister's pet or the Premier's favoured, and can toe the party line, the non-government business, which would normally take place after this session, would be an example of how they are limited in being able to represent their communities. All the motions we have seen to date have been about patting the government on the back rather than raising any issue that supports their particular electorates. Some others have received some benefit. Unions, for example, have not been unalloyed as well. Some unions have managed to get the benefits of supporting the Labor government at the last election. Some, of course, have been duded. They, quite rightly, expected they would be rewarded, but they have not been rewarded, so I suppose they are worse off since the last election. They usually expect their reward from a Labor government, but there are winners and losers.

There are those who have been appointed to sinecures. Ex-Labor politicians and those who have favoured the government over time and supported the Labor Party have been appointed to boards. A notable example, is union members who did the right thing by the Labor Party while in opposition and are being rewarded while it is in government by being appointed to tribunals. That has been at the expense of public servants who are apolitical and trying to do their jobs by restructuring the public service, which is Labor talk for getting rid of anyone who is not "with us" when they are in government, replacing them with people who will "do our bidding" rather than being professional public servants.

The Liberal-National government received a lot of criticism when it tried to introduce the rationalisation of the public service. A bill before this house that, fortunately, has stalled seeks to disadvantage those who have given loyal service. A raft of redundancies are now being balanced out by new recruits. So much for those economies. Certain niche and fringe groups have benefited from the \$39 million "Money for Votes" or Local Projects, Local Jobs. How is the chihuahua grooming van going, by the way? That was a great investment! I do not begrudge the little groups getting some benefit, a handout, from the government, but it has been at the expense of people who are doing it tough and having to pay for the belt-tightening that the government insists has to be borne equally by all for the purposes of budget repair, unless, of course, someone happens to be running a pop-up coffee van somewhere in the southern suburbs in a seat that Labor was keen to win. I think Hon Darren West mentioned a sum of money handed out to a small group so that it could publish a newsletter at someone's expense—well, it is at the taxpayers' expense—well done! Everyone had to tighten their belts, except, of course, the niche groups whose votes were being purchased. I look forward to seeing how some of those vastly important projects to small groups around the electorate—not supported by any business case, not going beyond a particular small number of people whose favour the Labor Party was trying to curry to win an election—are faring now at the taxpayers' expense and whether those groups will be looking for recurrent expenditure in due course. There is a vast need for grooming vans for small dogs! I hope it can extend its operations to Geraldton or to the northern suburbs at the very least.

Hon Sue Ellery: Spoken by a cat man!

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN: If it were a cat grooming van, I might have had to temper my views, but at the moment I am dealing with what we have got!

At any rate, those on Struggle Street must find it comforting to know that in the interests of budget repair, they are funding Labor Party vote-purchasing exercises. There are others. I do not, for example, begrudge Collie being supported and provided with services, but it must be of great comfort to know that in addition to the \$60 million industry attraction and development fund to create jobs and secure Collie's future—secure the future of Mick Murray or his successor, I would have thought—there was the announcement on 21 May 2019 of a \$12.2 million commitment from the McGowan government towards redeveloping Collie Hospital. That may be necessary, if there is a business case for it, but that is on top of the \$7.8 million refurbishment that was completed in 2017, which was an initiative of our government. What is the government's rationale? Its announcement states —

The State Government funding confirmation comes as Federal Labor's election commitment to fund the redevelopment will no longer proceed, given the result on Saturday (May 18).

That is a great comfort to those on Struggle Street! We are paying for a failed Labor government and a Prime Minister-to-be who was emphatically rejected by the country. The McGowan government is taking money out of the pockets of Western Australians to satisfy the policies of a government that was never elected. How wonderful!

Who else has benefited? I am sure that a number of business interests at the big end of town have benefited. I will tell members who has not. Hon Peter Collier made mention of mortgage stress and the like. I recall that on 20 August 2009, Hon Dr Sally Talbot introduced the Property Law (Mortgagee's Power of Sale) Amendment

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Bill 2009. The practicality of that was rejected by this house after due debate, but what she observed is interesting. The second reading speech states —

... civilian property possession applications for the 12 months to June 2008 were submitted for 696 properties, compared with 453 properties for the previous year ...

Let us look at what we have at the moment. That was meant to be a sign of mortgage stress. The latest figures from the WA Supreme Court show that lenders made 1 304 applications for civilian property reposessions in the last financial year—just over three a day. Now there is a vast improvement! I suggest that members read Hon Dr Sally Talbot's speech and compare it with the results of this Labor government over the last couple of years. Perhaps she will reintroduce her bill and it will be passed by this government.

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [10.54 am]: Part of the equation is missing from the motion before us today because there are always issues for governments to solve, review and address—always. The real test, though, is not that those issues exist but how we respond to those issues.

Hon Michael Mischin: Yes, hard decisions.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Did Hon Michael Mischin take interjections? I think not.

Hon Michael Mischin interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The Leader of the House has the call.

Hon SUE ELLERY: The real test is how governments respond to those issues. There is no question that some Western Australians are doing it tough and, as a government, we should be constantly striving to ensure that we do better to assist those Western Australians. I will make a couple of points before I get into how we are responding.

We are living in extraordinary times. There are global impacts on our economy that are beyond the control of this or any state government. There is a trade war between one of our oldest allies and one of our biggest trade partners; indeed, 25 per cent of the Western Australian economy is reliant on trade with China. A trade war between those two nations is cause for uncertainty across the world and here in Western Australia. Nationally, banks have changed their lending practices as a result of some of the appalling findings of the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry and so household finances have tightened. There is no question about that. At the federal level, we cannot get the federal government to improve and fast-track its approval processes to spend money on infrastructure projects. We cannot get the federal government's assistance to fast-track its part in the approval process, and we cannot convince it that there is more to providing stimulus to the economy than implementing personal income tax measures. Those are things we cannot control. However, there are elements that the state government can control, levers that it can pull to address economic circumstances and measures it can put in place to assist those who need assistance when times are tough. I will talk about some of those.

Most recently, the state government announced a range of measures to stimulate the Western Australian economy, including \$364 million worth of projects announced in the last couple of weeks. Those projects include \$81.5 million for upgrades to health facilities across Western Australia; \$200 million for a significant school maintenance blitz, which is on top of the hundreds of millions of dollars that government spends every year on school maintenance; \$53.5 million to make TAFE easier to access in key priority identified training areas and address the serious decline in the number of TAFE enrolments that occurred as a result of fee increases that happened under the previous government; and \$29 million to support residential development, with a very significant stamp duty rebate announced yesterday. I will talk a little more about those in detail.

With respect to the TAFE announcement, \$53.5 million has been committed to make training more affordable for thousands of students to give Western Australians the skills to take on jobs; the course fee per hour for 34 target priority qualifications has been reduced by 50 per cent and the maximum annual fees that students will pay have been capped at \$400 for young people and students on concession and \$1 200 for non-concessional students, taking course fees to be similar to or even below the 2013 course fee charges; and halving and capping course fees for selected high-priority qualifications from 1 January next year. That is how we are responding.

In the school maintenance blitz, every public school will receive a share of \$35 million to address outstanding maintenance items. The remaining \$165 million will be allocated to schools across the projects that have already been identified by the building condition assessment. I refer to upgrades, refreshments and rebuilds of classrooms, shade structures, playing surfaces, pathways, car parks and toilets. It will also include electrical upgrades, roof replacements, traffic management and solar panel installation. We will use local contractors as much as we can to give effect to that. That is how we are responding.

The government has announced a priority hospital maintenance blitz and over the next three years will spend \$81.5 million on infrastructure for health facilities across Western Australia. This will include high-priority maintenance works, which will improve conditions for patients and staff and create more local employment opportunities. I will

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not have time to list all the regional health facilities, but \$8.6 million of that money will be spent in the wheatbelt, \$8.3 million in the midwest, \$7.3 million in the south west, \$6.8 million on Kimberley health services, \$4.5 million in the great southern and \$1.5 million in the Pilbara and the goldfields. That is how we are responding.

In the stimulus package announced yesterday, stamp duty rebates were introduced to support residential developments. These rebates apply to preconstruction contracts for homes in multi-tiered developments. As of yesterday, buyers who sign pre-construction contracts to purchase new residential units or apartments in a multi-tiered development will be eligible for a 75 per cent transfer duty rebate of up to \$50 000. That is how we are responding.

Hon Simon O'Brien interjection.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Honourable members, I have limited time so forgive me if I do not take any interjections.

During the debate, honourable members raised questions about household fees and charges. There is no question that that issue is causing financial difficulty for some Western Australians. There is no question about that. Of course, I need to make the point that across the life of the previous government, fees and charges in that area increased by 25 per cent.

Hon Colin Tincknell: That is nearly three years ago.

Hon SUE ELLERY: Indeed, member. The real question, if I make that point, is: how are we responding to it? I will get to that, because it is important that we deal with both sides of the equation.

We needed to get the finances under control and we have done that. The member might ask, for example: in the previous government's budget, what was the projected figure for electricity prices for this financial year? The previous government projected an increase of seven per cent. This government has not done that because we recognise that it is hurting Western Australians. We have not only kept the increases to fees and charges at their lowest level in 13 years, but also put in place additional measures to assist those Western Australians who are struggling. It is not just about identifying the problem, but also how we respond to it. We are responding to the issues, Madam President. We had the lowest increase in fees and charges—the lowest increase in electricity prices since 2008, the lowest increase in water rates since 2005–06 and the lowest increase in charges for the representative household since 2006 as well. Whereas the previous government took away many of the protection and assistance measures from those who were struggling, this government increased the energy assistance payment by 28 per cent in the 2017–18 budget for anyone with a commonwealth concession card. New programs have been launched by our government to assist people with financial difficulties to pay their water bills, including the Medical Assist, Start Over and Time Assist programs. Funding for other concessions continues to increase, such as for the seniors' cost-of-living rebate, the hardship utility grant scheme, service charge rebates and driver's licence fee concessions. This is about not just identifying the problem, but also what we are doing to fix it. We have used sound financial management, recognised by the rating agencies that measure these things, to put in place some of those protections for people. The lowest increase in fees this year comes at a cost of \$300 million to the budget, but that is an appropriate spend and we are able to do that because we have fixed the finances.

I am a believer in Neville Wran's statement that one has to keep repeating themselves until they think they are going to vomit before people get the message. I heard an extraordinary thing in this place yesterday. In another debate, Hon Aaron Stonehouse said that he had never heard this government talk about the need to be prudent about how taxpayers' money is spent. I thought to myself: "Oh my God! Neville Wran was absolutely right. We have to keep repeating it." My good friend Hon Aaron Stonehouse had obviously not heard that message.

I want to touch on some other things that have been raised in the debate so far. For example, Hon Dr Steve Thomas just raised the issue of regional migration. When we came to office in 2017, we sought to exclude Perth from being defined as "regional" due to concerns related to the use of 457 visas. My other good friend Hon Charles Smith has asked a range of questions about the visa settings. The federal government's 457 visa was too broad and the parameters were too relaxed, meaning that Western Australian workers were missing out on jobs even in our capital. On 18 April 2017, the federal government acted on our concerns about 457 visas and abolished that visa type, which tightened the criteria and allowed foreign workers to apply for a visa only in areas in which there was a genuine skills shortage. Over the last six months, the federal government has made a number of changes to visa and migration settings, including the announcement of new visa and scholarship incentives to attract international students to study and work in regional areas of Western Australia and a proposal to streamline the definition of "regional Australia" for the purposes of new skilled and international graduate visas. That is a particular problem for Western Australian universities. Although they have satellite campuses, they do not, like the eastern states, have regionally based universities. We do not have a University of New England or a University of Wollongong. That has created a serious issue for Western Australian universities and they have been lobbying the federal government very hard —

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: And the state government.

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Hon SUE ELLERY: I will get to the state government. I am telling members that they have been lobbying the federal government very hard about the terrible impact that that is having on Western Australian universities. Our universities have identified to both levels of government the disadvantage that that has created. The state government has responded, because this is about not just identifying an issue, but also how we respond to it. We have listened to what stakeholders like StudyPerth and others have said about how to act in the best interests of Western Australia. Accordingly, we have written to the federal government requesting that Perth be considered as a regional area to improve our capacity to attract international students. We have been working very cooperatively with Hon Peter Collier's bestie Senator Mathias Cormann, and we hope that we can resolve that issue soon.

I have only one minute and 50 seconds to go. I want to touch briefly on what we are doing to assist the housing industry as well, because this is about not just identifying the problem, but also what we are doing to respond. Increasing the Keystart income limits has been an important measure. We have increased existing income limits by \$15 000 for singles and couples and by \$20 000 for families for the six months from July this year, giving more people access to loans and providing an important boost to the housing construction industry. Yesterday's announcement was greeted really well by so many key stakeholders in the housing sector. We are really pleased about that.

I do not resile from saying that we inherited the worst set of books. We have had to take hard financial decisions to correct those problems and then provide the kind of programs that we have been talking about today. Unlike the previous government, which could only spend and rack up debt, we can do more than one thing at a time. We can diversify the economy, we can help those people who need assistance and we can create more jobs, and we are. I encourage those opposite to stop talking down WA and to start supporting the measures we are taking to clean up the mess that they created.

HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan) [11.08 am]: I rise to speak on this motion, because it is really important and beholden on this chamber to recognise that many Western Australians are doing it extremely tough. We do them an enormous disservice if we do not acknowledge that. One of the key findings in the Western Australian Council of Social Service's report "Cost of Living 2018" was that for WACOSS-model households and those on fixed incomes, the increase in utilities and transport expenses has effectively wiped out any gains made by the softening of the rental market. For unemployed singles, it means that they have sunk further below the poverty line. I am talking about Western Australians who cannot meet a basic standard of living, let alone plan for the future. If they have any unexpected expenses, like whitegoods or ambulance fees—something that I have spoken about in this chamber previously—or even if they have other essential expenses such as training costs to better their employment chances, even if that training is half-price, it is simply not possible. That is the reality for people living in this state. The modelling assumes that people are able to find appropriate housing, but we also know that the lack of availability in regional areas means that that is not always the case. We also know that although the cost of housing in the Kimberley, in particular, has reduced, it is still far greater than it is in Perth.

One key issue in the Western Australian Council of Social Service statistics is the rise in the cost of utilities. I am talking about an 11 per cent increase in 2017–18, a seven per cent increase in 2018–19, and now, a 1.75 per cent increase for 2019–20. That has resulted in an unbelievable increase in the number of disconnections due to unpaid bills. This is happening when people already cannot meet a basic standard of living. Their day-to-day needs for shelter and food simply must come first, which means that, unbelievably in this day and age, electricity is not seen as an essential service. Thousands of people are being disconnected and the uptake of hardship programs is increasing. Over half of customers who enter the hardship program for electricity in WA have a debt of less than \$500, and over 80 per cent of people who enter the hardship program for gas have a debt of less than \$500. I read this as people who are running so close to the bone in WA that even a much smaller bill these days is proving impossible to pay without seriously impacting their day-to-day survival.

I note that the qualification rules for the hardship utility grant scheme has been identified as one of the reasons for the increase in instalment plans and enrolment in hardship programs. I also note that our rate of disconnection of residential electricity customers between 2016 to 2018 was higher than it was in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria, and that 2017–18 was the fifth year in a row in which we had a higher proportion of disconnections of residential gas customers than there were in New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria—grim news indeed, members.

I have been contacted on multiple occasions by people shocked to discover that they have been disconnected because their electricity retailer did not confirm contact with them prior to cutting off their power. I have also received letters in response to my inquiries on constituents' behalf that effectively state that an email was sent and a voicemail was left, and then people's supply was simply cut off. It is clear that electricity suppliers do not feel an overwhelming obligation to make genuine contact with people prior to cutting them off from this essential service. The nature of the cut-off means that even if people pay immediately, they will have to wait 48 hours before their electricity is reconnected. If someone happens to be unfortunate enough to have their electricity supply disconnected

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on a Friday, their electricity sometimes, unfortunately, will not be reconnected until about the next Tuesday. If people in the situations that I outlined earlier lose a freezer of food, the financial impost can be absolutely devastating.

What we do know is that there has been genuine wage stagnation and that growth in real wages across Australia has slowed to almost zero since mid-2013. That is despite substantial jumps in pay rates in Victoria. WA's annual wage growth is the weakest in Australia. Although the Reserve Bank has now recommended a 3.5 per cent minimum wage rise each year to enable households to service their long-term debts and to participate fully in the economy, we have seen in the meantime enterprise bargaining agreement pay rise rates slip significantly. I have to point out that the government's current wages policy is 100 per cent part of the problem.

I am aware that the government has pinned its hopes on resolving some of these cost-of-living and wage growth issues by creating more jobs. I am happy, obviously, to advocate for more jobs, with the understanding that without a commitment from industry and government, that will not necessarily lead to the pay rises that are so clearly needed, and that it also will not address the needs of our most vulnerable members within the community, including those on fixed incomes. That is why the Greens continue to advocate, along with the community sector, for a significant increase in Newstart. That is absolutely essential and would seem to be an obvious easy win if we want to look at growth within the economy.

One of the things the government keeps committing to is the expansion of the LNG industry. I think there has been a very generous reading of the number of jobs that are created in the oil and gas industry. I note that The Australia Institute estimates a significantly lower number of potential jobs than the figures the government keeps putting forward—that is before we even start to talk about the healthcare and other social costs associated with the climate harm of those projects. I am eternally disappointed with the lack of opportunities the government undertakes to expand alternative industries.

I want to say very briefly, because I know others want to speak, that people are doing it really tough, and the most vulnerable people within our community, particularly those on low, fixed incomes are doing it the toughest. A lot of them are simply finding it next to impossible to meet even the most basic standard of living. That is unacceptable in a country as wealthy as Australia. I think the focus on balancing the budget, as it has been applied, has impacted on services and supports for the very people who need them most—that is, the people on fixed and low incomes who are suffering the most. We need more jobs, but that will not help people on disability or age pensions or who are unemployed. I think there is a lack of focus on how to actually assist them. We have to recognise that there are people within the Western Australian community who are absolutely struggling.

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural) [11.17 am]: I will make a brief contribution because I know others want to speak on the motion. I want to quickly reflect on some comments I made during my contribution to the consideration of the estimates of revenue and expenditure, in which I pointed out —

... that this government was elected on a lie. It was elected on promises of creating jobs.

In fact, the unemployment data shows that unemployment has been trending up over the time that this mob has been in government and was trending down sharply before. Where are these new jobs? According to figures the Australian Bureau of Statistics released earlier this year, nearly 100 000 people are in the unemployment queue—a record for this state. This government is good at records, it seems. In fact, I came across a website yesterday and it seems that the only new jobs that are being created are those in Labor campaign HQ. I found a nice advertisement that states —

Do you want to work with Premier Mark McGowan and (WA Branch)?

It is looking for campaigners. I wonder how many unemployed people, those most vulnerable in our community, would get a look in the door for a job out of that little foray.

I also want to talk briefly about energy disconnections. We have now reached a record number of disconnections in Western Australia, with 22 000 people disconnected from electricity. Earlier this week, I asked a question about the south west interconnected system, and we were told that on the SWIS there were 8 000 disconnections in 2015–16 and 7 800 in 2017–18. That is a huge increase in disconnections. One of the most concerning things that has happened in the energy space since this government came to power is that it has put up fixed costs for connection to electricity. Those most vulnerable in our community—perhaps pensioners or others—sitting around the house turning all the lights off, putting a rug over their legs while they sit in front of their little bar heater, will not save them any money because those fixed costs will not go down by turning off the lights. That is a staggering thing to do to those most vulnerable in our community. It is staggering that this number of people have disconnected from the grid. I am still waiting for the regional figures. Even with the Horizon Power grid, we heard that 3 193 households were disconnected in 2017. That is another huge number of people being disconnected in regional Western Australia. The effect of what this government has done to the cost of utilities is profound and it hurts those most vulnerable in our community. It is not acceptable to say that the test is how we respond to issues. How have we responded in

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this case? What have we done to help Synergy's bottom line? This policy did not help Synergy's bottom line and it certainly does not help the vulnerable people in our community who are now suffering further without power and with the additional utility costs that they did not face before.

Briefly, I turn to another issue that my colleagues and I in the National Party have been pursuing—that is, this government's response to community safety out there in regional areas, in particular the rise of activism and rural crime. We hear repeated promises that the Attorney General is going to introduce legislation that will help those people out there to be safe.

Hon Martin Aldridge: They are hollow promises.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: That is right; they are hollow promises. Nothing has happened. Nothing is being done for the safety of those people in those communities. Nothing is being done to stem this rise in activism, despite the promises, and that is probably because the Attorney General, as others have identified, is too busy wasting taxpayer dollars pursuing legal action against us for no good reason.

Again, Western Australians are worse off under this government. I commend the Leader of the Opposition for bringing this motion before us today and for allowing us to have a discussion around this excellent issue that he has raised.

HON COLIN TINCKNELL (South West) [11.22 am]: I agree with everything that the honourable member said. There is not too much time left, and I know that other people would like to speak. I would like to talk about the top 10 things that the government could do. This motion states that Western Australians are worse off because of the direct results of the policies of this government. First, reduce payroll tax or raise the threshold. Second, reduce payroll tax or raise the threshold. Third, reduce payroll tax or raise the threshold. Fourth, do something about stamp duty concessions or reduce stamp duty. Fifth, streamline environmental approvals. Sixth, cut taxes. Seventh, reduce red tape costs. Eighth, reduce household costs. Ninth, reduce energy prices. Tenth, stop blaming others.

We keep hearing that people are worse off because of the trade war or the federal government or the last government. That is the excuse we get all the time. The Labor Party has been in government for two and a half years or more and we are still hearing these excuses. The facts are that the government is now getting a greater share of GST and the price of iron ore is fantastic, which has been the case for a long time. The government has the money. The problem that we face in Western Australia is that members of the public do not have any money. They do not have jobs. They are getting hit with higher charges. They cannot go and spend money in small businesses because they have none; the government has got it all. The government is using that money to pork-barrel for the next election.

We have to look at the major reasons that people are struggling. Unemployment, as the previous speaker mentioned, is really high. Employment is at a standstill. In a state such as WA, that should not be happening. The environmental approval process in the mining and oil and gas industries is very slow and costly. No wonder companies cannot get started and no wonder they cannot employ hardworking Australians to do these jobs. We heard Hon Robin Scott talk about some of the issues that people in the regional areas face. This is a city-centric government. It has 14 members from regional areas in both the upper house and the lower house and they do not represent the people in those areas. There is a good chance that the government will lose most of those seats at the next election.

We have an issue because the government is not listening to the ideas that are put to it by members of this house and other people. It is just in the business of blaming the trade war, the federal government or the last government.

HON TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan) [11.25 am]: I would like to speak to this excellent motion and give it my full support because I think it is the key issue facing Western Australia now, and, indeed, has been the key issue facing Western Australia for the past few years. The government has repeatedly attempted to make a virtue of so-called budget repair. There is some justification for that; indeed, there is always a reason for all governments to be scrupulous and disciplined in the way that they manage state finances. I think the overwhelming focus of this government has been to express the rhetoric around budget repair, and it has done so at the expense of outcomes at that level, and it also has come at the expense of the broader macro economy in Western Australia.

The announcement yesterday about stamp duty was interesting for two reasons. First, this government has reacted, recognising that perhaps it is not as popular as it thought it was and that things are not going as well as it would like them to be. It is reacting very defensively against a new parliamentary leader in Liza Harvey, and she has them on the run, dropping these little stimulus measures. I think it is very telling. Second, I think the election campaign for 2021 started yesterday as far as the government is concerned. It was a perfect media opportunity, and I think the announcement has a significant degree of merit. The fact that the government used the word "stimulus", when it is not throwing money in—it is just not taking money—is quite telling about its fears for the economy and also its sense that perhaps it has taken its eye off the ball. That is important. Governments need to balance their priorities and to run a good set of books. They also need to understand that what is driving this state is not a neat set of books

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but the health and vibrancy of the Western Australian economy. The Western Australian economy has not gone anywhere quickly over the past two and a half years, and it is to the enduring shame of this government that that opportunity has been lost. It is felt across the board in small business and it is felt most keenly at the level of households. This government has punished households. It has made them wear the pain for its budget repair rhetoric. People will take years to recover from the \$800 to \$850 a year increases in fees and charges in the first two budgets. People are going backwards. They have lost equity in their houses. A significant number of them are under mortgage stress. Governments can do very little to remediate those particular issues, but what they can and should do is look seriously at the economic drivers in this state.

This government has completely missed the opportunity to grow the small business sector. It must look very strongly, very keenly and very precisely at remediating payroll tax thresholds in this state. The previous Liberal government had a proud track record in reducing that burden on government. If anything, the need is more keen now. Significant action is needed in that space, otherwise the Western Australian economy and the households that constitute it will do nothing more than tread water under this government for the next two years, and that is completely unacceptable. I commend this motion to the house.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [11.30 am] — in reply: I thank all those who contributed to the debate on the motion. I stand by the motion. An enormous number of Western Australians are suffering. Ask the homeless, ask small business, ask those who are suffering as a result of utility price increases, ask those in Moora, ask those in the regions and ask those across the length and breadth of Western Australia whether they are better off now than they were pre the election in March 2017. I can say quite categorically and confidently that most of them will say no.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.